

WILLIAM S. WHITE

President's Post-Cuba Decisions

Full Weight of the Office Believed Now Felt as He Seeks Solution

John F. Kennedy is now feeling for the first time the full chill loneliness of that terrible and unsharable ultimate responsibility which lies upon him as President.

He is by no means isolated from advisers, but the truly intimate circle is narrowing in the afterglow of the Cuban tragedy. Setback and sorrow (sorrow for the anti-Castro Cuban patriots who died in the lost Cuban invasion is frankly shown by the President) have made Mr. Kennedy deeply aware that in the last hour of every crisis he is a man alone. At the end, decisions of fateful consequences are his alone.

All this he well knew academically, of course, before he took office. But a newly trained soldier may know in his mind that a coming action will be bloody without truly apprehending it in his whole being until he actually goes through that action. It is much this way with the President.

He had long known in his mind that since all life was a series of struggles, presidential life would be a series of great struggles, indeed. But a special awareness of the mortal nature of those struggles has now come upon him—not from theory but from experience.

So he is doing now what is natural to a man whose life—as a Naval officer during the war and as a politician—has been based more upon action than words. He is not shutting out those

advisers who are only "idea men." But he is turning more and more to those who are first of all men of proven competence and toughness in action—to those whose public affairs are combat types rather than staff officer types.

Two men, therefore, are now the men closest to the President. One is his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The other is Vice President Lyndon Johnson. Both were intimately involved in the President's own greatest personal crisis before now, Bob Kennedy as an indispensable ally in the fight for the presidential nomination and Lyndon Johnson as a powerful opponent.

The President knows from experience their determination, their fighting morale and that neither, whatever his faults, is in the least way afflicted by mushiness.

He also knows their loyalty—Bob Kennedy's unquestioning brotherly loyalty; Mr. Johnson's more impersonal loyalty to an administration of which he is an elected part.

To talk to the President is to see a man much altered in recent weeks. He is still calm and laconic. But no casual gaiety is in evidence now. He wastes no angry recriminations against anybody within his Government for the Cuban failure. He is fully prepared to take, and even to insist upon, the final responsibility which he knows is his anyhow.

The forthcoming review of our intelligence operations and our capacity to fight guerrilla actions was not ordered as a mournful autopsy over the past. It was ordered to find out what we need for the future.

The President is wryly amused at the self-serving leaks which have been going on around here to suggest that one fellow was right and another to blame. He is not hunting heads to chop off. All the same, this correspondent's firm impression is that the President's basic reaction to Cuba recalls what old Fleet Admiral "Ernie" King said when he was called to Navy command after Pearl Harbor: "When they get into trouble they send for the so and sos."

The term "so and sos" is not meant to suggest bad or conscienceless men. Rather it describes the untterrified "hardnoses," the men who once committed to a thing will carry it through to the end.

Finally, some predictions are made on this columnist's own responsibility alone: The Central Intelligence Agency within months will see the retirement as director of Allen W. Dulles, a holdover who was not intended to serve permanently. Its new head will be a "hardnose," possibly even Robert Kennedy himself and possibly another such as Navy Secretary John Connally. Mr. Connally, an old "Johnson man," fought Bob Kennedy at the Democratic convention with the same coolly furious skill with which Bob Kennedy fought him.